

Athlete Profile

Lisa Bard — There Are no Obstacles, Only Opportunities

It is true that 41-year-old Lisa Bard is a winter sports enthusiast and spirited wheelchair athlete, but then again, competition is at the core of her life. The competitive fire inside Bard may have less to do with prevailing over an opponent – on the basketball courts or snowy ski slopes – than it does with overcoming adversity. She was born with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a rare neurological disease that damages connective tissue. The result is arthritis and joint instability that causes dislocation and the tearing of connective tissue.

Bard was struck by a drunk driver at age 15 while working as a volunteer Police Explorer, leaving her in a coma with multiple injuries. Six years later, an undaunted Bard entered the U.S. Air Force National Guard and, within a few years, transferred to the Air Force Reserves. While serving, her cervical spine was damaged in the line of duty. She was honorably discharged in 1992.

Since then, Bard, who lives in Germantown, Md., has kept herself busy. Eventually realizing that using a wheelchair full time was the key to her mobility, she decided to re-enter competitive sports. It was a good decision, leading to numerous medals, honors and achievements for her athletic prowess.

Bard has attended the National Veterans Wheelchair Games since 2002, competing in weightlifting, softball, wheelchair slalom, air rifles and table tennis, earning her a collection of gold medals. She also handcycled races, taking first place in all races to date. Last year, Bard performed a martial arts exhibition from her wheelchair, breaking 15 boards in 60 seconds while demonstrating other unique techniques. (A Tae Kwon Doe national medalist, she will be testing for her third degree black belt later this year.) Also in 2004, she attended the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, to challenge herself even more on the slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

Bard is motivated to continue redefining herself as an athlete in both wheelchair athletics and winter sports, attempting steeper slopes and adding adaptive activities such as scuba diving, rock climbing and horseback riding. “I thought that skiing was out forever, and now, after one trip to the Clinic, I’m already attempting to ski untethered and balancing a mono-ski,” Bard said. “Competing at a national level, even if from a wheelchair, and now on a mountainside, exemplifies the hope and spirit I carry in my heart. By never giving up, I’ll always be a winner!”

In a short period of time, Lisa Bard has become an effective ambassador for disability issues. She has enthusiastically volunteered for public outreach events, such as disability awareness programs at Washington, D.C. area schools. Her enthusiasm for competing and achieving shows that her disabilities will not hinder her drive to live her life to its fullest. Bard’s personal motto is: “There are no obstacles, only opportunities.” She often shares this message with others, conveying her conviction to never give up.

For the past three years, Bard has been a point guard for a Division III *men’s* NWBA (National Wheelchair Basketball Association) team and also manages and plays for the Washington Wildfire, a women’s NWBA team in the D.C. area. Her athletic achievements have been featured on several major news affiliates locally and across the country. In 2004, she began coaching wheelchair basketball for Blaze Sports through the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C. Also in 2004, she was inducted into the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame.

Bard is enthusiastic about the Winter Sports Clinic. “It was awesome! I finally mustered the courage to go out there on the mountain and now you couldn’t keep me away. It was literally one of the best weeks of my entire life! I’m still talking about it, and get tears in my eyes when I describe all the firsts that I conquered in Snowmass.” The Clinic is held each year in Snowmass Village by Aspen, Colorado.